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Going once...

Christie's previews Marilyn Monroe collection

July 27, 1999

Web posted at: 5:17 p.m. EDT (2117 GMT)

NEW YORK (CNN) -- The size 5 dress Marilyn Monroe wore when she sang "Happy Birthday" to President John F. Kennedy in 1962 is going to the highest bidder. It's among 1,000 items that belonged to the actress, slated to be auctioned off by Christie's in October.



The collection, which includes costumes, jewelry, books and furniture, is open to the public for viewing at Christie's Rockefeller Plaza location until August 11. Highlights from the collection are scheduled to tour at Christie's locations in Los Angeles, London and Paris, before returning to New York for the auction, scheduled for October 27 and 28.

Monroe, born Norma Jean Mortenson in 1926, died on August 5, 1962. She left her personal effects to her acting coach and mentor, Lee Strasberg. He died in 1982, and his widow Anna Strasberg is selling the collection.

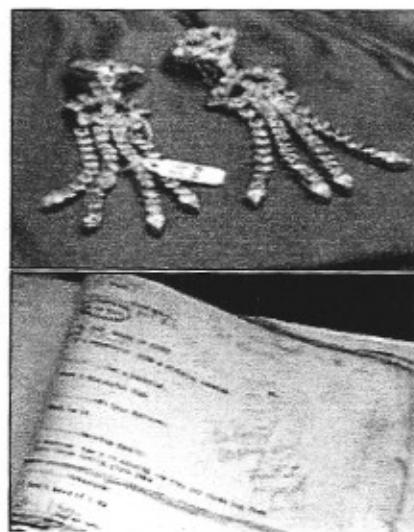
"The family has kept it archived, curated and intact in an amazing condition for almost 40 years," says Nancy Valentino, senior vice president of marketing at Christie's.

Soufflé dress, DiMaggio's 'eternity band'

The full-length, flesh-colored "silk soufflé" dress she wore at Kennedy's birthday bash is expected to fetch six figures. French designer Jean Louis made the dress for her, with more than 6,000 beads.

"It was impossible for her to wear undergarments with this kind of dress," Valentino says. "She was literally sewn into it, and I think what's interesting is she wanted it to be so close-fitting that it was cut to her body and actually measured to her body."

Perhaps the item with the most sentimental value is the diamond-and-platinum band given to Monroe by her second husband, late



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baseball great Joe DiMaggio. He and Monroe were married for nine months in 1954. The "eternity band," which holds 35-baguette-cut diamonds, is expected to sell for at least \$30,000.

Other items on the block include a white silk quilted headboard (pre-sale estimate of \$2,000 to \$4,000); a baby grand piano (\$10,000 to \$15,000); her last driver's license (\$3,000 to \$5,000); a red-sparkle vinyl weight bench with weights (\$4,000 to \$6,000); and potholders and an oven mitt (\$800).

Beyond the glamour

Monroe's books and film scripts -- on which she scribbled notes to herself -- offer a revealing look at the film siren who starred in some 30 films, including "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (1953), "The Seven Year Itch" (1955) and "Some Like It Hot" (1959).

"While some of her characters might have been nonchalant and more on the fluff side," Valentino says, "she took herself very seriously; she took her acting very seriously."

In the margins of the 1962 script for "Something's Got to Give," Monroe wrote: "Some changes should be made but not like this -- either they have to trust me to play the scenes with heart, or we are lost. This writer maybe (sic) good but what has been written new pages will inhibit me."

Monroe left Strasberg about 400 books. Some were first editions, like Jack Kerouac's "On the Road." There also are classics like "The Fall" by Albert Camus, and there are children's books, like "The Little Engine That Could." Most of them are expected to sell between \$800 and \$1,500.

Proceeds from Monroe's library and fur collections are to go to the Literacy Partners and The World Wildlife Foundation, respectively.

CNN Correspondent Cynthia Tornquist contributed to this report.

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